

Building Teamwork and the Importance of Trust in a Business Environment¹

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Introduction

Trust is a big issue in today's business world, where trust between employees (associates) and employers has been waning. It is difficult, if not impossible, to have effective and productive working relationships without trust (Castro 1994). Therefore trust is critical for every business, especially where teamwork is important. Teamwork involves trust among team members and between management and associates. This article discusses what trust is and why it is critical in business, why businesses need teamwork to survive, and tips for team building.

Why Trust Is Critical in Business

Webster's Dictionary defines trust as the "assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something." Trust is a critical issue due to interdependence and is the basis for creating a healthy work environment. According to Heathfield (2002a), trust is the necessary precursor for the following:

- Feeling able to rely upon another person
- Cooperating as a group
- Taking thoughtful risks
- Experiencing believable communication

In other words, "trust forms the foundation for effective communication, associate retention, motivation, and contributions of discretionary energy" (Heathfield 2002a).



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Developing Teamwork to Survive

Many have heard the statement that there is "no 'I' in the word 'Team.'" This is as true today as it has ever been. Businesses have found that the key to successfully completing and accomplishing projects is often through the development of teams. Whereas in the past, teamwork was used only for special projects, now it is often the norm (Castro 1994). Teamwork has become an essential element for the success and survival of a business.

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True collaboration, however, is a problem that plagues companies when trying to develop a teamwork environment. It becomes a problem because, in the real world, individuality is rewarded more often than team participation. Managers must be able to develop ways for associates to grow and develop as a team. Team building is not always the easiest task to accomplish, but consider the five tips listed in this article to incentivize your associations into building effective team collaborations.

Tips for Team Building

John Castro (1994), CEO and President of Merrill Corporation, likens trust and teamwork to getting on a train: once on board, everyone who wants a seat should get one. Management is responsible for building trust and finding associates who want to participate as a successful team (Castro 1994).

There are many ways that management can create and manage successful teams. Heathfield (2002b) offers five helpful tips on how this can be accomplished.

Tip 1: Form teams to solve real work issues and improve real work processes

The manager should provide the team with teamwork training and opportunities to engage beforehand on systematic methods of team work. Then, having gained some experience, the team can focus on accomplishing the project, not necessarily simply focusing on how they should work together as a team.

Tip 2: Hold departmental meetings to review projects and progress

It is the manager's responsibility to recognize when a group is not developing a healthy relationship. Departmental meetings give the manager the opportunity to examine the team's progress. If a team is falling behind, the manager should look to see if the team has personality issues or other difficulties in agreeing on the best approach for the assignment.

Tip 3: Build fun and shared experiences into the organization's agenda

The manager should help the team think as a unit within a positive or a fun work environment so that everyone on the team feels involved and appreciated. For example, management could sponsor company dinners or business trips to sporting events or team retreats.

Tip 4: Use icebreakers and time-limited, fun team-building exercises

The manager should use icebreakers and group activities at the beginning of meetings to promote interaction and camaraderie among team members. The bottom line is that icebreakers help associates to get to know each other on a more personal basis.

Tip 5: Celebrate group successes publicly

The manager should recognize the group as a whole for their accomplishments, not just offer individual feedback within the group. Constructive group praise is always the best policy to motivate team development.

Conclusions

Castro (1994) describes the process of trust, teamwork, and change as a journey. And although managers cannot force their associates to trust each other or to work as a team, they can provide associates with the needed resources to build trust. Once trust is established, managers have a better opportunity to accomplish the company's goals.

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